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ABSTRACT

As the silent majority of higher education, community colleges are beginning to understand and use their political clout. These institutions comprise the fastest growing segment in higher education, now enrolling half of all freshmen and sophomores in the United States. Community colleges will continue to be the first choice of women, Blacks, people of Hispanic, Asian, and Native American origin, and immigrants. They attract excellent students who want small classes, dedicated teachers, instructional support services, and low tuition. Two-year college programs have not been served by or well represented in professional organizations, including those for speech communication. The fault lies in part with four-year colleges, which do not realize the significance of community colleges and their contributions to speech communication. Although it is inappropriate, community college faculty are judged against the "publish or perish" standard of universities. Community college members rarely are recognized for their contributions on Speech Communication Association (SCA) committees. The SCA's community college section should: (1) educate SCA about the significance of community colleges; (2) lobby for community college representation on all SCA committees and task forces; (3) seek to increase community college membership in SCA; and (4) develop policy positions on major SCA issues. Community colleges can bring together the teaching and scholarship that have grown apart at the universities. (SG)

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Beware the Mouse that Roars: Community Colleges in SCA

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Beware the Mouse that Roars:
Community Colleges in SCA

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In Peter Seller's famous movie, The Mouse that Roared, the Duchy of Grand Fenwick, all 5-3/4 square miles of it, concocts the following plan: declare war on America, instantly lose, and then live happily ever after on U.S. foreign aid. But, their plans go too well. They win the war, conquer the U.S., and inherit all of its problems.

Although there have been war rumblings in the community college section of SCA, it is unlikely that community colleges can takeover their umbrella organization. What could happen, however, is more foreboding for the speech discipline. As the silent majority of higher education, community colleges are beginning to understand and use their political clout. Unless SCA makes a concerted effort to include community colleges as valued members, the results could be calamitous.

Community colleges are the fastest growing segment in higher education, now enrolling half of all freshmen and sophomores in America. Furthermore, community colleges will continue to be the first choice of women, blacks, people of Hispanic, Asian, and Native American origins, and immigrants. Once considered stop-gap, cooling-out schools of last resort, community colleges are now attracting excellent students who want small classes, dedicated teachers, instructional support services, and low tuition.

According to 1990 data from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (p. 176), 49.9 percent of all first-time entering freshmen in higher education begin their college career at two-year colleges. The American Association of Community and Junior Colleges reports that approximately 6 million students are enrolled in credit courses and 4 million in noncredit classes at our nation's community and junior colleges. Despite the significant number of students being served by two-year colleges and the concomitant number of faculty teaching at such institutions, two-year college programs and their faculty have not been well served by or well represented in their academic discipline's professional organizations. The case in speech communication is no exception.

The lack of support for community colleges in speech communication is, at first, understandable. There were no community colleges when Winans, Woolbert, and Wichelns served as the association's presidents. In SCA's 77 year history, only one community college member has served as president - Anita Taylor in 1981. And, because of a change in institutional affiliation, Dr. Taylor is officially listed as representing a university. It wasn't until the 1970s that community colleges were made a section of SCA and guaranteed national and regional representation on the Legislative Council. Until the late 60s, SCA could not be faulted for failing to serve its community college members.

At first glance, it is possible to conclude that "we've come a long way, baby." Close scrutiny, however, reveals another story -- a sad tale of reluctant (if not, recalcitrant) acceptance as well as an unwillingness to acknowledge the strengths and contributions of community college members.

The fault, dear friends, is not entirely SCA's. In part, it lies in the ignorance of our four-year college colleagues. They either don't know or don't understand the significance of community colleges and their contributions to speech communication. They may not know that most freshmen and sophomores in higher education will take their first, and in most cases, only speech communication course in a community college. In addition, community colleges often function as a "farm team" for communication majors and university faculty.

Blame also can be laid at the feet of community colleges. Like any minority group seeking acceptance by the dominant culture, community college members frequently have relied on inappropriate models of scholarship to gain acceptance and recognition. Whereas the "publish or perish" syndrome still holds sway at universities, it is an inappropriate measure of scholarship for community colleges. Research and publication records are still the standard against which community college faculty are judged to determine their value as academics.

For anyone who doubts the above assertions about the neglect of community colleges in SCA, a brief historical review can suspend disbelief. Whereas community colleges battled hard and

long for the creation of a community college division, the victory resulted in the creation of many sections in SCA. The four-year colleges never lobbied for a division or section, but were granted such status when community college were moved from oblivion to division/section status. When the SCA constitution was changed to guarantee the inclusion of community college members on the Legislative Council, there was long, bitter, and fortunately unsuccessful repeal debate. When the Legislative Council voted to include one of the association's journals as a membership benefit, they also voted to exclude to The Speech Communication Teacher as a membership option. When SCA appoints important tasks forces and committees, community colleges are often under-represented in relation to their stake in an issue. The recently constituted Communication in the Undergraduate General Education Committee has, for example, 18 members; only two represent community colleges.

Although community colleges have many good friends in SCA, all is not well. Too often, community colleges are not recognized as valued, albeit feisty element of SCA but are treated as a nuisance. Community colleges inclusion on SCA committees and task forces often seems to be a reluctant concession to "affirmative action" or as a way of avoiding criticism. Community college members rarely are recognized for excellence unless they abandon their instructional mission for traditional research and scholarship.

The growing chasm "communication scholars" and "speech teachers" in SCA portends a serious problem. Unless the two negotiate a peaceful settlement, escalated conflict or speech teacher secession could result. Unless there is a rapprochement, the above situation could result in one or more of the following scenarios:

1. Like NCTE and MLA, the teachers and researchers in SCA could split into two organizations, or

2. Community college membership in SCA could decrease until there is almost no representation from two-year colleges. Lack of community college involvement in SCA could result in little or no influence on the content or instruction of speech communication courses in a significant segment of higher education, or

3. Researchers and teachers in SCA can join forces to include, support, and recognize the contributions and perspectives of community colleges in SCA.

In The Past is Prologue: A Brief History, published by SCA in celebration of its 75th Anniversary, an article is reprinted from "Shop Talk," in the Quarterly Journal of Speech, October, 1964. Giles W. Gray, the Editor of QJS described the founding of the Speech Association of America.

> ...one can almost say that it was the recalcitrance of the National Council of Teachers of English and the refusal of some of its most influential members and officers to yield to any point, in the slightest degree, that provided the impetus for a separation.

"The Past is Prologue" may be a prophetic title. The issues that prompted the founders of SCA to separate from NCTE are similar to those that divide today's speech teachers and researchers. In 1915, SCA was formed with 160 members. Certainly, the 650 plus members of the combined K-12 and community college sections of

SCA along with Phi Rho Pi have many times those numbers to justify secession and creation of a separate organization.

Despite the ease with which separation can be justified, this writer does not advocate this course of action. Unlike the NCTE that refused "to yield to any point, in the slightest degree," SCA has yielded on many points. There is a community college section with all membership rights and privileges guaranteed. Community college members are represented on important national committees and task forces. Community college have genuine friends and supporters among the most influential members and officers of SCA.

The task of negotiating a better standing and a peaceful settlement with SCA must be initiated within the community college section. As an agenda for the 1990s, there are several avenues for future action:

1. The community college section should develop a strategy to educate SCA about the significance and contributions of community colleges.

2. The community college section should better organize its political efforts to lobby for community college representation on all SCA committees and task forces.

3. The community college section should plan a campaign to increase community college membership in SCA.

4. The community college section should develop policy statements and position papers related to major SCA issues and initiatives.

In addition to the above actions, there is one other service that community college should perform for SCA. Community colleges are uniquely positioned and maybe the one place in SCA where teaching and scholarship can still be linked. Effective

and experienced educators, no matter where they teach or what they teach, know that faculty scholarship brings vitality to the classroom. The separation of teaching and scholarship at the university, so vitriolically described by Page Smith in Killing the Spirit, has not been true at community colleges. In fact Smith sees community colleges as the hope of higher education.

> [Community colleges],...with close ties to their parent communities, free for the most part of the snobbish pursuit of the latest academic fads that so warp their university counterparts, and free also of the unremitting pressure to publish or perish, are, I believe, the hope of higher education in America. Unheralded and scorned or patronized by "the big boys," they carry out their mission with spirit and elan. (pp. 19-20)

The infamous "Publish or Perish" syndrome is not the appropriate model of scholarship at community colleges. A more realistic and defendable approach to scholarship was development by George Vaughan (p. 27) and was shared with SCA audiences at the then controversial and now all-but-forgotten debate between Burgoon and Engleberg/Wynn in 1990.

> [Scholarship is]...the systematic pursuit of a topic, an objective, rational inquiry that involves critical analysis. ... Scholarship is the umbrella under which research falls, for research is but one form of scholarship. Scholarship results in a product that is shared with others and that is subject to the criticism of individuals qualified to judge the product. This product may take the form of a book review, an annotated bibliography, a lecture, a review of existing research on a topic, a speech that is a synthesis of the thinking on a topic. Scholarship requires that one have a solid foundation in one's professional field and that one keep up with the development in that field.

Just as community colleges expanded educational opportunities for Americans seeking higher education, the community college section can enlarge the function and form of scholarship

in SCA. There are many ways to achieve this goal. A comprehensive textbook review in Communication Education should be valued as much as a multiple factor analysis in Communication Monographs. A new textbook in public speaking, interpersonal communication, or debate should be greeted with the same enthusiasm and respect as a new book on Levi-Strauss, the Lincoln-Douglas debates, or women's suffrage. SCA awards should not elevate research above teaching but should recognize outstanding achievements in both area as professional scholarship.

In The Mouse that Roared, the Duchy of Grand Fenwick never expected to succeed in its quest to conquer America -- but it did. The community college section of SCA may not expect to win all of its battles with SCA - but it could. All that is needed is a good plan, a strong will, a little bit of chutspah, and a commitment to a new form and function of scholarship. Community colleges are not seeking "foreign aid" from SCA but an equal partnership. That is not asking too much for a section that serves almost half of all undergraduates in America. It is a partnership that community colleges have a right and duty to claim.

November 2, 1991

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